

The Influence of Spirituality on the Career Development of College Seniors: An Examination of Work Values

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This study explored the relationship between spirituality and work values among graduating college seniors at a large public mid-Atlantic Research-Extensive institution. Gender differences in this relationship were also examined. Via an online survey, 429 participants completed Super's (1968) Work Values Inventory and Wheat's (1991) Human Spirituality Scale. The results revealed a low, but statistically significant relationship between spirituality and intrinsic work values ($r=0.40$). Between spirituality and extrinsic work values, an even lower, but statistically significant relationship existed ($r=0.15$), with men exhibiting higher degrees of relationship than women. These findings inform the practice of career counselors by raising awareness of gender influences on spirituality and career development.

Higher education is experiencing a resurgence of interest in spirituality. Within student affairs in particular, concern for the whole student (Jablonski, 2001; Temkin & Evans, 1998) has provided impetus for examining spirituality as both a developmental process (Fowler, 1981; Love, 2001, 2002; Love & Talbot, 1999; Parks, 2000) and an aspect of diversity (Hoffman, 1995; Jablonski, 2001).

Heightened awareness of spirituality is occurring against a backdrop of higher levels of materialism and career orientation among college students (Astin, Parrott, Korn, & Sax, 1996; Levine & Cureton, 1998). However, while materialistic concerns are prevalent for many college students, they do not negate the existence of other nonmaterialistic concerns. With regard to career orientation, Levine and Cureton found that although students may be interested in pursuing socially meaningful careers, they often feel that they have to choose between "doing good" and "doing well," between "helping others" and "having material resources" (p. 138).

The purpose of this study was to examine career development among graduating college seniors through the lens of work values, exploring whether levels of spirituality influence levels of intrinsic and extrinsic work values among this population. This study adopted the following definition of spirituality developed by Wheat (1991):

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The personal valuing, experiencing or expression of (a) a larger context or structure in which to view one's life, (b) an awareness of and connection to life itself and other living things, and (c) a reverent compassion for the welfare of others. (abstract)

Work values were defined as "values that individuals believe should be satisfied as a result of their participation in the work role" (Brown, 2002, p.49). Intrinsic work values refer to "objectives that can be satisfied in the work itself," and extrinsic work values signify "objectives that can be satisfied through work as a means to an end" (Hood & Johnson, 2002, p.166).

This study utilized a correlational research design to examine the relationship between levels of spirituality and levels of intrinsic and extrinsic work values among college seniors. Three research questions guided this inquiry:

1. Do college seniors with higher levels of spirituality exhibit higher levels of intrinsic work values than those with lower levels of spirituality?
2. Is there a relationship between college seniors' levels of spirituality and their levels of extrinsic work values?
3. Are there differences in the relationship between spirituality and work values for women and men?

Review of Literature

Many models of spirituality tend to focus on internal processes rather than external behaviors (Cook, 2000; Love & Talbot, 1999). The faith development models offered by Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000) provide insight into college students' spiritual meaning-making processes. Fowler's and Parks's stage-based models examine spirituality through the concept of faith. Both Fowler and Parks consider faith to be a universal dimension of human experience, one which serves an integrative and synthesizing function by helping individuals to make meaning in a complex world. Within Fowler's model, two stages in particular, Synthetic-Conventional and Individuative-Reflective, illuminate where college students may be in their development. The Synthetic-Conventional stage, often encountered during adolescence, is characterized by a reliance upon external affirmation and approval, which can cause an individual to struggle with staying connected to others while honoring the emerging self. When an individual begins to question his or her beliefs and examine them more critically, the individual moves into the Individuative-Reflective stage. Characteristic of this stage is the movement from reliance upon external authorities to reliance upon an internal authority, which Fowler calls the "executive ego" (1981, p. 179). Since this model was developed based upon the experiences of White Americans from Judeo-Christian backgrounds, only with tentativeness should this model be applied to individuals from diverse cultures and religions (Fowler, 1986).

Parks (2000) also provides insight into college students' spiritual meaning-making through her focus on the faith formation experiences of young adults, whom she

considers to be individuals between the ages of 17 and 30. Similar to Fowler's Individuative-Reflective stage, Parks's young adult stage is characterized by a movement towards self-definition as an internal authority begins to emerge. For individuals in this stage, many of life's big questions may remain unresolved, such as those dealing with belonging, purpose, and vocation. During this period of ambivalence, young adults often benefit from the support of mentoring communities.

As young adults ponder their future paths, spiritual questions of purpose and vocation are likely to emerge within the career development process (Dalton, 2001). One crucial component of this process is identification of work values (Brown, 2002; Judge & Bretz, 1992), especially since research has shown that work satisfaction is more highly correlated with values than interests (Hood & Johnson, 2002). Super and Sverko (1995) studied work values across many cultures in international settings and were not able to determine any definitive trends or value hierarchies for the prioritization of intrinsic and extrinsic work values. However, Super and Sverko acknowledge the difficulty of this task due to the multiple impacts upon work values, such as socioeconomic status, degree of maturity, and other situational factors. Brown's discussion of the interaction between work values and cultural values emphasizes the influence that culture can have upon the way in which one approaches work. Although Brown cites the need for more research on this important interaction, based upon the research that has already been conducted there is some evidence to support that cultural differences in social values (e.g., individualist versus collectivist orientations) affect how individuals prioritize work values and derive satisfaction from their jobs. Researchers have also studied how work values are impacted by gender (Bennett & Stadt, 1997; Johnson, 2001; Leong, 1991; Post-Kammer, 1987) and Christian religious orientation (Lewis & Hardin, 2002). The studies examining gender present conflicting results.

A few studies have investigated the relationship between spirituality and career development (Colozzi & Colozzi, 2000; Lips-Wiersma, 1999/2000; Royce-Davis & Stewart, 2000; Vecchione, 1999/2000). In one quantitative study involving undergraduates at a mid-size Midwestern university, Vecchione explored the relationship between career development and holistic wellness utilizing a wellness model that was organized around the concept of spirituality. Out of the five factors used to measure holistic wellness—love, friendship, spirituality, self-regulation, and the conglomerate group of work, recreation, and leisure—the only factor to have a significant relationship with one of the career variables was spirituality: spirituality was found to be negatively correlated with Career Development Attitudes, a variable representing career planning and career exploration (Vecchione). The largely White American and female composition of the sample and the study's Midwestern locale limits the extent to which Vecchione's findings can be generalized to other populations. Royce-Davis and Stewart also explored the relationship between spirituality and career development on an undergraduate student population. Through a series of open-ended interviews with 10 students

from diverse backgrounds, two categories of spiritual issues that affect students' career development were identified: spiritual struggles and spiritual growth. Spiritual struggles included "search for meaning" and "loss of focus" (pp. 5-6), and in many cases, these struggles prevented the students from moving forward in their career development or in their degree programs. However, spiritual growth had a positive effect on students' career development. This growth consisted of identifying a personal value system, realizing and pursuing a "calling," and finding connection and spiritual community. While Royce-Davis's and Stewart's research highlights students' development of an internal authority, sense of purpose, and awareness of interdependence, the small number of participants makes it unclear if the larger student population would share similar experiences, and the location of the study at the University of the Pacific potentially limits the extent to which the findings can be applied to college students in other parts of the country.

Studies examining spirituality and career development among adult populations have revealed an even more intentional aim to incorporate spirituality into one's work life (Colozzi & Colozzi, 2000; Lips-Wiersma, 1999/2000). Colozzi and Colozzi found that many people search for a "calling" or spiritual significance to their work, and personal identification of an intrinsic value system can often aid individuals in discovering their spiritual purpose. Colozzi and Colozzi also discuss the difference between expressed values and implied values, viewing the former as being often externally imposed and more readily available to individuals' consciousness while the latter are more deeply rooted in the self and can be more challenging to discern. Their research has shown that implied values are more reflective of individual's true work values. Lips-Wiersma also investigated spirituality and career development by examining how career choice, transition, and experience were impacted by spiritual meaning-making. Through qualitative means, Lips-Wiersma identified four spiritual purposes that gave meaning to the research participants' work: developing and becoming self; union with others; expressing self; and serving others. All 15 participants experienced these spiritual purposes even though they held diverse spiritual beliefs and represented different genders, cultures, and socioeconomic statuses. However, the age of the sample, 39 to 55 years old, and the study's location in Australia limit the extent to which the findings can be applied to traditional age college students and individuals in different geographic locales.

Method

Sample

The research participants were seniors in their last semester of study at the University of Maryland, a large public Research-Extensive university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Stratified random sampling was used to secure a racially diverse sample proportional to the larger institutional population: African American ($n=300$), Asian American ($n=300$), Hispanic American ($n=200$), and White American ($n=1200$). Among these 2,000 students, 1033 were female and 967 were male.

With a response rate of 21.45%, the sample obtained consisted of 429 graduating seniors, including 292 females and 131 males. The following racial/ethnic groups were represented: African American ($n=36$), Asian American ($n=56$), Hispanic American ($n=32$), Native American ($n=1$), White American ($n=269$), and Multi-racial/Multi-ethnic ($N=24$). While Hispanic and White students were slightly oversampled, African American students were slightly undersampled. The participants acknowledged the following religious and spiritual affiliations: Agnostic ($n=37$), Atheist ($n=19$), Buddhist ($n=6$), Christian ($n=240$), Hindu ($n=8$), Jewish ($n=53$), Muslim ($n=7$), Sikh ($n=2$), and Other ($n=43$). Compared with estimates of religious and spiritual affiliations for University of Maryland students (Ortega & Sedlacek, 2000), Christians and "other" affiliations were overrepresented in this study. Data concerning family income were also collected, and the expected and obtained income levels also differed significantly, though the patterns of these differences varied and exhibited no consistent trend. As another indicator of economic background, the sample exhibited the following percentages for personal and college loan debt: 47.60% less than \$4,999; 18.40% between \$5,000 and \$14,999; 17.20% between \$15,000 and \$24,999; 9.60% between \$25,000 and \$34,999; and 3.00% between \$35,000 and \$44,999.

Participants were asked to indicate the types of work experience they have had related to their major or career path, including co-op, internship, part-time job, practicum/student teaching, volunteer work, and "other"; 73.70% reported having two or more types of related work experiences, and only 4.70% reported none. Post-graduation plans for the sample included 57.10% full-time work, 19.30% full-time graduate school, 15.40% combination of work and graduate school, 1.20% full-time volunteering, and 5.60% indicated "other" plans.

Finally, although participants in this research study were not asked to supply their age, it is expected that the use of random sampling produced a sample of students that is representative age-wise of the graduating senior population at the University of Maryland. Students at the university have an average age of 23, and the majority of seniors (70.30%) are between the ages of 21 and 22 (P. Phillips, personal communication, April 25, 2003).

Instrumentation

Students were asked to fill out an online survey that contained the following instruments: Super's (1968) Work Values Inventory, Wheat's (1991) Human Spirituality Scale, and 10 demographic questions.

In order to measure intrinsic and extrinsic work values, Super's (1968) Work Values Inventory was used. The Work Values Inventory uses 45 questions on a 5-point Likert scale to test the degree to which each respondent rates the importance of 15 work values. Each work value is measured by three items within the range of "very important" to "unimportant." The intrinsic work values on the scale include achievement, aesthetics, altruism, creativity, intellectual stimulation, and management (Post-Kammer, 1987). The extrinsic work values include the

following: associates, economic returns, independence, prestige, security, supervisory relationships, surroundings, way of life, and variety. Reliability was established through test-retest means during a two-week interval, yielding a Cronbach alpha of 0.83 (Post-Kammer, 1987; Super, 1970). Super also demonstrates support for construct, content, and concurrent validity, but there is no support for predictive validity.

Spirituality was measured using Wheat's (1991) Human Spirituality Scale. This 20-item instrument contains the following subscales: Awareness of and Connection to Life, Compassion, and Larger Context. Response choices use continuous variables on a 5-point Likert scale. The interval scale employs two different ranges: "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," and "constantly/almost constantly" to "never/almost never." The Human Spirituality Scale has been shown to be valid and reliable. Concerning content validity, a table of specifications was used to establish content coverage, and a panel of five judges, all of whom held doctorates in related fields, reviewed the instrument to establish content relevance. Three research studies resulted in the demonstration of construct validity. Finally, item analysis produced estimates of scale reliability. An item discrimination index > 0.03 was demonstrated for each item, and a Cronbach alpha of 0.89 was found for the total scale.

Data Collection and Analysis

The survey was administered via the World Wide Web using the institutional resources provided by the University of Maryland's Office of Information Technology. The sample of seniors was contacted via e-mail and asked to complete the online survey within a two-week period of time. The e-mail contained a link to the survey website, and the participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. While students were not asked for their student identification numbers, at the end of the survey they were asked to provide their e-mail address (the one to which the survey was sent), and this enabled the researcher to track who responded to the survey. Seniors who did not take the survey after one week received a second e-mail inviting them to take it. Raffle prizes were offered as incentives.

At the end of the two-week data collection period, the data were downloaded onto the researcher's computer and analyzed using SPSS (Version 11.5). In order to examine levels of the independent and dependent variables, composite scores for spirituality, intrinsic values, and extrinsic values were created by summing each subject's responses for each of the three categories. However, before doing so, the researcher recoded the responses so that higher levels of each of the three variables would be reflected by higher scores. In addition, according to Super's (1970) recommendation, missing scores on the Work Values Inventory were coded as three, the middle value on the 5-point Likert scale. Analyses conducted include descriptive statistics, reliability tests on both scales, and correlations to examine the research questions. The Fisher Z-transformation was used to determine whether there were gender differences for the relationship between spirituality and work values.

Results

For both the Human Spirituality Scale (Wheat, 1991) and the Work Values Inventory (Super, 1968), the overall scale was more reliable than the subscales. Inter-item consistency tests on the subscales of each instrument resulted in Cronbach alphas that ranged from 0.70 to 0.80 on the Human Spirituality Scale and from 0.56 to 0.90 on the Work Values Inventory. However, the overall Cronbach alpha for the Human Spirituality Scale was 0.87, and for the Work Values Inventory, it was 0.90.

For the first research question, an alternative directional hypothesis was used: college seniors with higher levels of spirituality have higher levels of intrinsic work values than those with lower levels of spirituality. A one-tailed correlational analysis was performed on spirituality and intrinsic values. A low but statistically significant relationship was found (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Correlations between the spirituality subscales and the individual intrinsic work values were also calculated, and the strongest relationship found was between Larger Context and Altruism ($r=0.46$, significant at the 0.01 level).

Table 1

Correlations between Spirituality and Intrinsic Work Values

	Spirituality	Intrinsic Values
Spirituality		
Pearson Correlation	1.00	0.40
Significance (1-tailed)		0.00
N	402	402
Intrinsic Values		
Pearson Correlation	0.40	1.00
Significance (1-tailed)	0.00	.
N	402	429

Table 2 displays the finding for the second research question, which adopted a null hypothesis: there is no relationship between college seniors' levels of spirituality and their levels of extrinsic work values. In order to test this hypothesis, a two-tailed correlational analysis was performed on spirituality and extrinsic values. A negligible but statistically significant relationship was found (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). The sole negative relationship discovered between any of the work values and spirituality was for Economic Returns, which exhibited two statistically significant negative correlations with Awareness ($r=-0.11$, significant at the 0.01 level) and Compassion ($r=-0.16$, significant at the 0.05 level).

In order to test the third hypothesis, that there are no differences in the relationship between spirituality and work values for women and men, separate correlational analyses were conducted for intrinsic and extrinsic values. The relationship between spirituality and intrinsic values was computed first for women

and then for men. The Pearson correlations obtained for each gender were then compared within the context of the sample sizes of women ($n=275$) and men ($n=126$) through the Fisher Z-transformation. The same procedure was then repeated for extrinsic values. Table 3 displays the findings of this test, which revealed a significant gender difference for the relationship between spirituality and extrinsic work values.

Table 2
Correlations between Spirituality and Extrinsic Work Values

	Spirituality	Extrinsic Values
Spirituality		
Pearson Correlation	1.00	0.15
Significance (2-tailed)	.	0.00
N	402	402
Extrinsic Values		
Pearson Correlation	0.15	1.00
Significance (2-tailed)	0.00	.
N	402	429

While the correlational analysis for Hypothesis III examined whether there were statistically significant differences for women and men in the relationship between spirituality and work values, the researcher also conducted *t*-tests to explore whether statistically significant mean differences existed for women and men among the individual variables of spirituality, intrinsic work values, and extrinsic work values. Statistically significant differences were found for all three variables, with women consistently scoring higher than men.

Table 3
Spirituality and Work Value Correlations According to Gender

Variable Pair	Women ($n=275$)	Men ($n=126$)	Significance
Spirituality/Intrinsic Values	$r=0.35$	$r=0.41$	$p<=0.51$
Spirituality/Extrinsic Values	$r=0.04$	$r=0.28$	$p<=0.02$

Discussion of Key Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between levels of spirituality and levels of intrinsic and extrinsic work values among college seniors. While a substantial link between spirituality and extrinsic work values was not anticipated and not found, such a link was expected between spirituality and intrinsic work values. Although a statistically significant relationship in the positive direction was detected between spirituality and intrinsic work values, the relationship was not as strong as hypothesized. However, spirituality’s relationship

with intrinsic work values was much stronger than its relationship with extrinsic work values, which supports the original notion that intrinsic work values are more closely linked with spirituality levels, a hypothesis grounded in spirituality's propensity to foster the development of a more intrinsic value system. Perhaps one of the reasons why the relationship between spirituality and intrinsic work values was not as strong as predicted is that the college seniors in the sample, many of whom were traditional age, may not have been as spiritually mature as had been anticipated. Faith development, as described by Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000), progresses from reliance on external authorities (e.g., society, family, friends) to the development of an internal authority deeply rooted in the self, and the students sampled may still be in the process of developing their internal authority.

Another aim of this study was to detect whether there are gender differences in the relationship between spirituality and intrinsic and extrinsic work values. When interpreting the results of the Fisher Z-transformation for significant differences in correlations, it is important to recognize that the study experienced response bias according to gender, with more than twice as many women as men responding to the survey. Although the Fisher Z-transformation calculated sample size into its analysis, it is possible that response bias could have still influenced the results. While the Fisher test revealed no gender difference in the relationship between spirituality and intrinsic work values, a statistically significant difference was found for the relationship between spirituality and extrinsic work values: men exhibited a stronger, though low, relationship between these two variables (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Although women displayed higher levels, on average, of spirituality, intrinsic work values, and extrinsic work values, interestingly it appears that men exhibited greater consistency in exhibiting similar levels of spirituality and extrinsic work values. Perhaps patriarchal gender role socialization, which historically makes it more socially acceptable for men, as "breadwinners," to subscribe to extrinsic values, may have increased the compatibility between extrinsic and intrinsic orientations for men whereas these two orientations may have been more dichotomized for women and therefore less related with regard to work values and spirituality.

The significant gender differences found in levels of spirituality and work values can be interpreted within the context of previous research. Citing studies conducted by Erikson, Gilligan, and Ochs, Wheat (1991) discusses gender differences in spirituality levels, explaining that women tend to be more spiritual than men, at least until mid-life. Knox, Langehough, Walters, and Rowley (1998) also discovered that women displayed higher levels of intrinsic spirituality and religiosity than men. Concerning work values, some studies (Johnson, 2001; Post-Kammer, 1987) have shown that women tend to rate intrinsic work values more highly than men, at least during their earlier years, and the results from this study confirm this trend. While recent research (Bennett & Stadt, 1997; Marini, Fan, Finley, & Beutel, 1996, as cited in Johnson, 2001) has shown that the gender gap for extrinsic work values is closing, women's higher levels of extrinsic values in this study are surprising. Johnson cites one study conducted by Marini et al. that

revealed similar results among adolescent females and males. However, while the current study's findings may be indicative of an emerging trend, the unequal representation of women and men in the sample creates a need to be cautious about drawing solid conclusions.

Implications for Practice

Spirituality is not an isolated dimension of human experience, but rather, as this study's findings reveal, it has relevancy to career development through its relationship with intrinsic work values. Recognition of this relationship and acknowledgement of potential relationships with other aspects of career development can aid career counselors in their work with college students. For example, discussions with students about their sense of meaning and purpose can create opportunities for them to give voice to their spiritual concerns and deeply held values; recognition of these will help students approach career development in a holistic fashion and make choices that are congruent with their inner selves (Dalton, 2001).

Spirituality's relationship with extrinsic work values can also inform the practice of career counselors. This study's findings revealed that higher levels of spirituality are to some degree related to higher levels of extrinsic work values for men. This finding reflects the juxtaposition of materialistic and nonmaterialistic concerns that Levine and Cureton (1998) discovered in their nationwide study of college students. When working with male students, career counselors may find that these students similarly struggle with "doing good" and "doing well." In this situation, career counselors could be instrumental in helping students identify careers that pay well and are also socially responsible. This finding also emphasizes the importance of being aware of the potential impacts of gender on spirituality and work values.

Limitations of the Study

When considering the generalizability of this study's findings, it is important to note the presence of any limitations and threats to validity. The context of the study, a large public Research-Extensive university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, limits the extent to which the research findings can be generalized to college senior populations at other types of institutions and in other regions of the country. In addition, the extent to which the findings can be generalized to the larger population of graduating seniors at the University of Maryland is somewhat limited by the sample obtained. While the researcher had hoped to obtain a sample representative of different demographic groups, this goal was not wholly accomplished, and it is important to recognize that in some ways the sample represents those used for traditional research since the majority of the participants were White American, female, and Christian. The intentional selection of a random sample stratified by racial/ethnic groups illustrates one attempt to secure ample representation of students of color, but the semi-success of this effort is also limited since the validity of the survey instruments for students of color has not been demonstrated through previous research.

Concerning the internal validity of the design, the web-based nature of the survey created the possibility of a historical threat since students took the survey at different times and in different locations. The administration of the survey in March 2003 also created the situation where the last 20 respondents of the 429-person sample took the survey during the beginning of the United States' war against Iraq. In addition, it is possible that social desirability could have influenced the results. Nevertheless, this study provides an introductory view into an area of career development that has previously received little attention, and the modest, yet significant findings expose a need for further research on spirituality's relationship to career development.

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